

IN UTAH, PARENTS OF INFANTS ARE TWICE AS LIKELY TO CHOOSE FAMILY CHILD CARE OVER A CHILD CARE CENTER. Parents may feel more comfortable leaving an infant in a home-like setting, with one provider rather than with a “team” of teachers in a child care center.

What is Family Child Care?

Family child care is a licensed form of care in the state of Utah. It is defined as child care in a family residence that provides care for more than three but fewer than seven children at a time. Some exceptions to the size of the group apply to school age children. Utah also licenses Family Group Homes, which are operated by two child care providers caring for up to 12 children. In a family child care home, no more than two children may be under two years of age. In a family group home, no more than four children may be under the age of two.

Child care in a family residence for one to three children, less than four hours a day is exempt from licensing in Utah. Child care provided by a religious or educationally exempt entity are also exempt from licensing. These types of care are known as legally exempt child care.

In addition, there are many informal, unlicensed arrangements made by parents that are casually referred to as family child care. This may include a neighbor or relative caring for a child, or a caregiver providing care without reporting it to the Office of Licensing. There is no way to know exactly how many families are using this type of unregulated care.

Family child care can offer important benefits to working parents:

- It is often more widely available.
- There is a greater likelihood of finding care in desired location.
- It offers a home setting rather than a school setting.
- There is an opportunity to keep siblings together in child care.
- It can offer the flexibility to accommodate unusual schedules, mildly ill children or other emergencies.
- It is usually the least expensive form of care.

Family Child Care and Your Workforce

It's likely that many of your employees with children currently use or have used some form of family child care. As a result, you are an indirect participant in the family child care delivery system in Utah.

There is a roughly nine-to-one ratio of family child care providers to child care centers in Utah. Depending on your company's location, your employees may pay anywhere between \$50 and \$150 per child, per week for family child care.

Family child care is local. In other words, it is ideal for providing services to employees in their own town or neighborhood, near the worksite, or along their commuting route. The fact that it is decentralized is one of its greatest advantages.

The Down Side

Despite its relative availability and flexibility, family child care has some drawbacks as well:

Quality

Given its home setting and casual nature, the quality of family child care—even licensed care—can vary widely. Unlike a child care center, where trained teachers and a director provide supervision, family child care providers are on their own. For many parents, finding good care can be frustrating.

One Utah employer laments: "We have done such a good job educating parents on quality child care that I know one mother who spent two months looking and couldn't find it. She was very frustrated. The wonderful setting that we are telling parents to look for is often not available."

Turnover

Being a family child care provider can be a demanding job for relatively low wages. Caregiver "burn-out" is a serious problem, and affects the quality of care provided, as well as the availability of care for your employees. Turnover in family child care homes can be as high as 50% per year. For your employees, the loss of a child care arrangement directly affects their ability to get to work.

Family providers typically only get paid an average of \$4.90/hr for a 49-hour work week. Providers have little or no sick or vacation pay, and most make no contribution to social security, Medicare or retirement accounts. Most married child care providers receive health benefits through their spouse's job, but as many as 20% have no health care benefits at all.

Lack of Professional Development Opportunities

The fact that a provider is licensed means that they have complied with *minimum* standards for child care quality. Most providers have no support system, no opportunity to get training and limited funds for replacing child care materials or improving their program.

Need for Resources

Employer involvement in family child care should focus on the following:

- Recruitment of new providers
- Incentives to encourage existing providers to stay in the field
- Professional development opportunities to create motivation and upgrade quality
- Support to improve both quality and morale
- Coalitions and networks to decrease isolation, create bonds, and strengthen commitment.

A family child care network allows employers to stabilize the supply of child care by creative services that address these issues.

Creating a Family Child Care Network

To create a family child care network, an employer recruits new or experienced providers in the locations desired, and reserves places for employees' children. An employer can create a network that meets specific geographic, budget or scheduling needs. Employers may also contract with a local child care resource and referral agency to organize and support a network.

The purpose of a family child care network is to provide a stable supply of good quality child care so that your employees can work.

By nature, family child care homes are often more flexible and broader in scope than child care centers.

They can be thought of as a creative solution to workplace issues such as care for mildly ill children, vacation or emergency care, or odd-hour care—particularly care which is needed in the early morning or late evening. A family child care network can be created with one or more of these issues in mind.

These networks may also be used as “satellites” to an on-site child care center, and as such, can help meet the needs of employees who are not able to use the center because of space or budget limitations. A family child care network works very well when paired with a tuition assistance plan, which typically helps parents pay for care either in or outside of the network.

In some cases, an employer might also choose to develop or sponsor a new child

care provider for the purpose of providing child care services exclusively to their own workforce. Sponsorship might be as limited as helping the provider through the licensing process, or as extensive as helping a provider secure and pay for a location, supplying the location with necessary equipment and supplies, and subsidizing the cost of care.

Why is Sponsoring Family Child Care a Good Choice for Employers?

Understanding the advantages and limitations of family child care is the first step. For the employer, family child care has some interesting attributes:

Location

Do you need child care near your suburban plant? Do your employees prefer care near their own homes, rather than commute with children to your city location? Providers may be recruited in exactly the location you prefer.

Flexibility

By nature, family child care providers are more likely to be able to tailor programs and policies to meet parents' needs. As an employer, you may be able to locate providers who are willing to provide care during **odd hours** such as early morning, or late evening; providers who will provide care during **vacations and holidays**; for **mildly ill children**; or providers who are willing to provide **transportation services**, if needed.

By creating services tailored to the needs of your work force, you are enabling employees to work when you need them.

Lower Cost

You might choose to subsidize family child care, or to pay for technical assistance, training or important materials and equipment. Even if you decide to start a new family child care home, or to sponsor several new programs, your costs will be lower than if you were establishing a child care center.

What Does a Network Do for My Employees?

Creating a child care network is of great value to employees with children. It is important that the care be licensed, and that high quality standards be maintained—otherwise employees will not use the care. Cost is also an important issue. If parents cannot afford the care, they will not use it. If affordability is a problem, consider combining your network with a child care tuition assistance plan.

**A network
is only as strong
as the child care
providers
themselves.**

New providers must be recruited in order to keep up with employee demand for care. In any employer network, there will be some periods of under-utilization and others of high demand. This fluctuation is to be expected.

A small number of employees may choose to use child care centers or care in their own homes despite the availability of a family child care network. As an employer, your interest is in trying to expand the options available to employees for finding and using care most suitable to their own family circumstances.

What Does Setting Up a Network Involve?

Like any program, a family child care network involves start-up, implementation, and ongoing support.

- ~~Start-up~~ involves identifying the need and geographic area, and recruiting providers.
- ~~Implementation~~ includes establishing provider agreements and contracts, informing employees about the network, and starting enrollment.
- ~~Support functions~~ might include technical assistance to providers in the form of workshops or written educational materials, and ongoing recruitment of new providers as needed. The network requires monitoring and on-going support in order to stay active.

All of this is made easier if an experienced administrative organization, such as a child care resource and referral agency or a family child care association is available to provide consultation and management services.